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ABSTRACT

The strategy used in evaluating an out-of-doors resident camping program for emotionally disturbed children is outlined. This strategy calls for examining the following elements in the program: (1) program goals and objectives; (2) collection and processing program data; (3) camper progress assessment; (4) program audit; (5) assessment of past campers; (6) case study file; (7) educational accreditation; (8) comparative studies with other existing programs; and (9) presentation of evaluation results. (JD)

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AN EVALUATION PROGRAM FOR THE ECKERD FOUNDATION THERAPEUTIC WILDERNESS CAMPING PROGRAM: AN EVALUATION OF AN ATYPICAL ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

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AN EVALUATION PROGRAM FOR THE ECKERD FOUNDATION THERAPEUTIC WILDERNESS CAMPING PROGRAM: AN EVALUATION OF AN ATYPICAL ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Introduction

> Perhaps the greatest challenge of the many confronting evaluators at this point is to overcome the idea that the methodology of evaluation is identical to the methodology of research . . . . The purpose of research is to provide new knowledge that is universally valid. The purpose of evaluation, however, is to delineate, obtain, and provide information for making educational decisions. (Stufflebeam, et al, 1971, p. 140)

The set of possible decisions facing the administrator of the innovative program is even more broad and complex than that presented by the "typical" program. By virtue of the "maverick" status of the atypical program, its very existence and rationale is challenged at every turn. Even internally, the atypical program is constantly faced by upheaval, change, and question as it tries to modify and adjust its original construct in light of new insights and discoveries. The atypical program is thus faced with the dual demands of improving and proving itself.

Innovative programs in the behavioral sciences present an unusual array of circumstances to the potential evaluator.

- What decisions must be made and what information is needed to make them?

- Should the process or the product be assessed? Or both?

- Would internal or external evaluation be most effective or is a combined approach indicated?

- In what climate or context must evaluation be conducted?

- Will evaluation be accepted by the organization itself?

- What degree of commitment and sophistication is present within the organization?

Agarwala-Rogers (1977) observes that, "One of the main reasons for conducting evaluation research is to obtain information that will improve program operations. By itself, evaluation research is of little importance, unless and until its results are put to use (p. 328)."

The Camp As A Therapeutic Milieu

The use of the out-of-doors as an environment for the development of youth has a long precedent -- rooted in man's own origins. In America especially, the romance of the wilderness and the frontier state of mind is very much a part of the culture. But, except for recreation and occasional nostalgic departures, society has generally been preoccupied with technological development and social progression, -- a course that has taken it far from its origins.

In the mid part of this century, a growing concern for mental health began to emerge along with an awakening understanding of the impact of technology and civilization on the welfare of the individual. Camping programs began to take on more serious overtones as programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, Outward Bound, outdoor education, and the more recent Walkabout alternative (Gibbons, 1974) to education received attention. Some of these programs turned to

elements of the encounter group and organizational development laboratory techniques developed by Kurt Lewin, Carl Rogers, the National Training Laboratory, and England's Travistock Institute. In the late 40's concerns for mental health, therapeutic processes, group laboratory methods, and the multi-faceted environment of the out-of-doors were combined to create therapeutic camping programs for emotionally and behaviorally disturbed youth.

The therapeutic process is not dependent upon a camp environment but the elementary situations provided by the out-of-doors setting do provide a wealth of opportunity for easily tailoring situations to meet the needs of behavior modification. The constant demands placed on coping skills and problem solving methods have the potential of producing significant impact on self-esteem. In the primitive setting, the results of behavior are usually more immediately apparent and decidedly more vivid than they would be in comparable situations experienced in more evolved and artificial environments.

Therapeutic camping additionally provides a more acceptable alternative for the client. Parents of emotionally disturbed children are often more willing to place their child in a therapeutic camp for treatment than in clinical psychiatric situations, as camp enrollment tends to provide fewer adverse labels. Finally, the romance, challenge, and pure enjoyment of living near nature makes camping a potentially joyful experience for the youngsters themselves.

The Therapeutic Process

The therapeutic camping process removes the child from the environment that may have contributed to his disturbance and places him in a

new, more spartan environment -- one that is physically and emotionally secure but situationally demanding. There he participates in a treatment process involving small group interaction. This treatment emphasizes real living situations in which each group member is a necessary, contributory partner. It involves creative experiences, group and self analysis, goal development, personal disclosure, interpersonal communications, parental counseling, trust building, and close relationships with positive adult role models. The intent of these methods is to modify deviant behavior, increase self-esteem and confidence, and improve coping skills to such an extent that these changes will continue after the artificial environment is removed.

Development of a Therapeutic Model

In 1947 the Dallas Salesmanship Club, a group of prominent local businessmen, expanded a summer camp program for underprivileged children into a year-long, pilot program for emotionally disturbed youth. In this program, the youngsters were put into small groups and required to provide for their own comfort, shelter, meals, maintenance of equipment, recreation, etc. (Loughmiller, 1965). This camp experiment stressed the meeting of basic problems created by group living in a harsh and elementary surrounding. The principle goal was to help the individual adjust to self and others in group or societal living situations (Kimsey and Frost, November 1969).

There have been numerous other experiments with the therapeutic camping model besides the Salesmanship Club Camp. The Pressley Ridge model in Pittsburg (Fremouw, et al, 1977) and the Anneewakee Foundation Camp in Douglasville, Georgia (Krippner and Weintraub, 1971), are prominent examples.

Development of the Eckerd System

In 1968 the Salesmanship program was brought to Florida by the Jack and Ruth Eckerd Foundation of Clearwater. The Eckerd Camping System, which calls itself the Eckerd Wilderness Educational System, has since expanded into three states and currently involves nine camps with a capacity of nearly 450 clients. Except for one female camp in Florida, the Eckerd camps treat only males. The Eckerd Program in Florida is presently accredited as an alternative school system.

There have been few significant changes in the Eckerd model from its origins in the Salesmanship Camp. Most of those changes that have occurred were dictated by the intra- and interstate expansion, the broadened financial base, and the increased staff size. The most significant program change within the camps has been the inclusion of a "transitional classroom" which is designed to ease the child's transition from the camp to the real-world educational or training environment and to deal with specific individual learning difficulties.

In the Eckerd Wilderness Educational System the client remains in the camp for a period presently averaging about fourteen months. During this time, four-day home visits are allowed at six-week intervals. The first part of the stay in camp centers around meeting individual behavioral needs within the group; and activities involve coping with the day to day demands of living in the out-of-doors and on trips out of camp. These trips may be of considerable length and are of an educational and adventurous nature. They include such things as river canoe or raft trips, backpacking treks, museum visits, or visits to governmental bodies. Each trip must have a purpose and plan outlined by the participants and a post-trip report is made concerning goals achieved.

While in camp, clients live in temporary structures or "tents" that they plan and construct themselves as group projects. These structures are made of canvas-like material laced over a pole framework. Their living conditions are rustic by intent and provide limitless opportunities for problem solving, coping, and educational enlightenment.

During the early part of the camper's stay, a conference is held between parents and camp staff to evaluate the individuals's needs and characteristics. As a result of this evaluation, an individual camper therapeutic and educational plan with pertinent goals is developed.

A key element in the therapy plan is the frequent group discussions with the counselor acting as facilitator. These sessions are conducted at planning and group goal setting points, at moments of stress or conflict, and at the end of each day. Central to these sessions are the disclosure and sharing of feelings, problems, and needs, along with the development and evaluation of group and individual goals.

The later portion of the camp stay involves the beginning of a transition into life's mainstream. At this point, the client is transferred to the transitional classroom group. In this group, there are two certified teachers as well as a camp counselor. The transitional classroom makes use of the camper's prior group experiences and other available opportunities to nurture the individual camper into a more formalized learning environment. Learning here is individualized; and the teacher attempts to meet the learning problems unique to each child. The intent is to provide a transition that will allow the camper to reenter a school or vocational training situation with a greater chance of success than would have otherwise been possible. The transitional

classroom element to the camp was instituted by the Eckerd Program as a result of needs identified by several previous program evaluations and past camper opinion surveys.

Previous Evaluations of the Eckerd Program

With a few exceptions, most past studies of therapeutic camping programs have suffered from the following problems:

1) Concentration on cause-and-effect relationships, end behavior analysis, or isolated behaviors or criterion.

2) Reliance on short-term studies.

3) Use of small samples or bias in sample selection.

4) Application of typical techniques to an atypical system.

5) Effects of political influences with a resulting high level of subjectivity and bias.

Cause and Effect Relationships

The problem with simplistic cause-and-effect or end product studies is the unpredictable and uncontrollable influence of other factors. Frequently, these influences are unknown, unmeasurable, or ignored. Additionally, their influence may be greater than the target treatment and this influence may be exerted over a much longer period of time. Wrightstone, Hogan, and Abbott (undated) state that the greatest problem with cause and effect evaluation is the isolation of a behavior to the multiple influences on that behavior, within and from outside of the program that is to affect it. They go on to say that:

> The identification and measurement of these within- and without-school interactive effects, is an overwhelmingly complicated undertaking. It may then be that assignment

> of responsibility to the specific individuals who contribute to pupil achievement will never be feasible and that responsibility may have to be allocated to a more comprehensive unit. (p. 3)

Medley (1977) states that the purpose of evaluation is the improvement of the process in behavioral science; but the complexity of localizing and attributing success to any single factor, or group of factors, makes process evaluation preferable and infinitely more practical than end-product evaluation (pp. 12-19). Figure 1, adapted from an unpublished manuscript by Oron South (South, undated, p. 13b), illustrates some of the factors that can contribute to individual behavior and their interactions. As can be seen, it is presumptuous to assume that there is a primary cause-and-effect relationship between ultimate behavior patterns and any given independent variable or set of independent variables. This is especially true in the therapeutic camping treatment, considering the number of variables that have exerted an influence prior to camp entry (an average of 13 years) and for and indeterminate length of time after program departure, when the camp treatment was applied for only an average of a little over one year.

The primary thrust of atypical program evaluation must be the assessment and documentation of program processes and not end results. Concern for the end-product of treatment to the exclusion of process evaluation is analogous to saying that the end justifies the means. In behavioral science, real people -- human beings -- are the client and a more humane rationale is that the means may be at least as important as the ends. Freeman (1978) observes that:

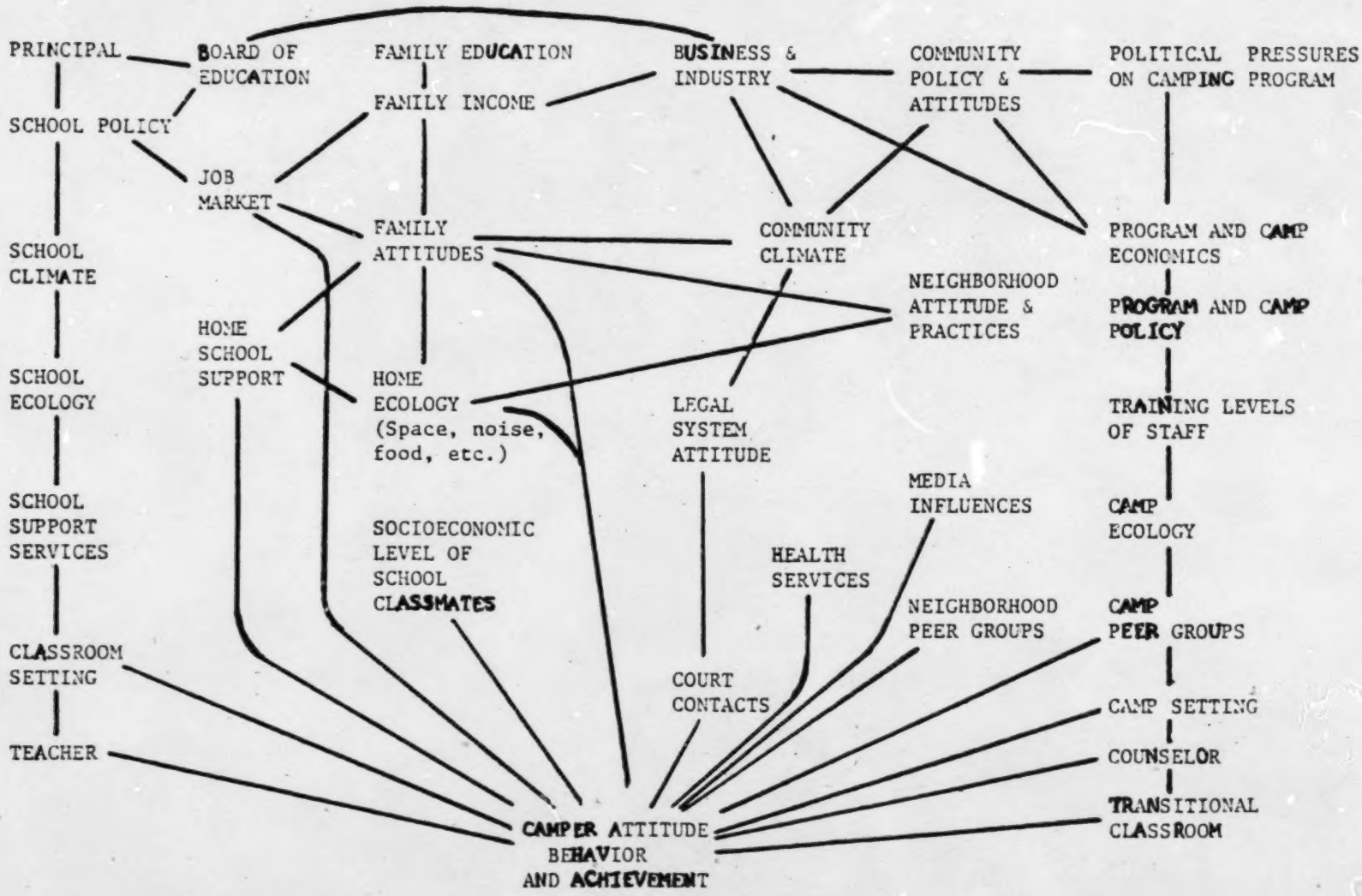

Figure 1

Selected Factors Contributing To
Camper Behavior and Achievement

> Evaluation research, as noted, needs to consider two important process questions: (1) whether or not programs are delivered in ways consistent with the intended intervention or action effort and (2) whether or not these programs are delivered to appropriate targets . . . in the case of programs that are innovative, and which are being tested in order to decide upon their widespread applicability and utility. Failure to know about the implementation process limits reproducibility and broad implementation. (pp. 30-31)

Short Term Studies

Typically, evaluation conducted by external agents is of a short-term nature. This often results in a focus on selected characteristics, consideration of a limited number of criteria, and limited sample size. The short-term evaluator's acquaintance with the program in all its nuances is also usually limited and this often causes the study to concentrate on the wrong aspects or the evidence to be biased by the occurrence of the "unusual" or "window dressings." Short-term "inspections," thus, tend to be difficult to defend and are often subjective and prone to political uses (even when not, in reality, being politically inspired).

External evaluation is also often viewed with suspect by the organization itself. Agarwala-Rogers (1977) observes that:

> Evaluation may be especially fearful when the evaluation researcher is an outsider to the organization. Being an outsider ensures that the evaluator comes to his task

> with fresh ideas and a wide perspective, and that the evaluation results will be perceived as having relatively higher credibility than if the evaluator were an insider. But along with these advantages of outsider evaluation comes inevitable pressures toward negative results. The evaluation researcher, because he comes from outside the organization, feels that in order to justify his worth to the agency he should recommend important changes in the organization's present operations. Thus it is expected that outside evaluators are more likely to "find" and report negative results. And naturally such negative feedback is resisted and feared. (p. 330)

Internal evaluations (those conducted in-house by program employees) have the advantage of allowing for more program insights and more lengthy assessment but they tend to lack credibility as they are prone to internal political pressures and influences. The evaluator who depends upon the program being studied for his well-being is severely handicapped, no matter how strong his professional intent or ethics.

Interestingly, few comprehensive evaluations of therapeutic camping programs have been documented by internal agents. This may be due to the fact that few of these programs have the size, assets, or felt need to justify the expensive talent and resources required of this task. But also, internal evaluation is of only limited use when called upon to explain or justify programs to others.

The alternative to short-term, external evaluations or intimately knowledgeable long-term, in-house evaluations is a study by an external

agent not solely dependent upon the organization, economically, but able to have close access to the organization over a long period of time. This access should allow a study of all significant factors under a variety of situations; and the agent should be able to function in-house for a sufficiently long time to become "part of the background."

Agarwala-Rogers (1977) suggests that more usable and credible evaluation is possible by developing "linkers" with the system. These linkers could serve as communications ties between the practitioner and the evaluator. They can articulate system needs, select and translate evaluation data, and assist the organization in implementation of findings (pp. 331-332). Agarwala-Rogers also points to six factors that increase the probability that an organization will utilize evaluation (p. 332):

1) Building of evaluation into a program as an integral system with its own budget.

2) Providing both internal and external evaluation components.

3) Providing evaluation results when needed by the organization.

4) Not interfering with ongoing program elements.

5) Presenting results in an understandable and usable manner in a language and form that is easily interpreted.

6) Reporting results through multiple channels of communication -- oral, written, visual, statistical, etc.

An internal-external cooperation of evaluators that conducts its work over a sufficiently long period of time to see real significance and which has an established and protected position within the organization, is rare indeed. This is a time-consuming and expensive process

and only a relatively stable program, larger than those studied previously and possessing a broad financial base can justify this expenditure. Few systems are capable of financing such a solution. This has resulted in a reliance on one-shot, short-termed evaluations.

Bias in Sample Selection

The limited size of most therapeutic programs has severly handicapped past evaluators and has often tempted them to make general conclusions based on very small sample sizes. Atypical programs are developmental and usually present only limited samples with which to work. Shifts in the process during program evolution compounds this problem as the treatment may vary within a sample. This causes bias and unacceptably small sample sizes when trying to use typical approaches. The expansion of the Eckerd System to nine camps presents an opportunity to obtain a satisfactory sample size within a single program and should provide data that is subject to fewer biases.

Application of Typical Techniques to an Atypical System

Most past evaluative efforts of therapeutic camping have imposed typical or classical techniques to the uniquely atypical Eckerd program. This imposition of typical measures has usually resulted in a failure to identify the source of need, the feeling of discontent felt by the client, or the critical question needing a response. Where the purpose of the evaluation was purportedly to improve or assess effect, it often failed to provide data which would help the decision-makers select courses of action, or to even define the information needed to make decisions. The results often were subjective or poorly focused, subject to a variety of interpretations, depending on motive, or failed to provide

specific guidance.

The application of typical or experimental designs to existing atypical behavioral science programs conflicts with the principle that evaluation should facilitate program improvement. Experimental design inhibits the change process as it is difficult to accomodate the alteration of treatment during the course of the study. Therefore, the evaluator of an innovative program will have extreme difficulty in accepting the rigor of an experimental design or attempting to trim a program to fit available "off the shelf" research models. A great deal of flexibility and innovation is required of the evaluator who must assess the moving target presented by the atypical program. The development of atypical solutions thus requires the application of correspondingly atypical approaches.

Political Influences

External political influences have too often colored past evaluation efforts. Particularly during the periods of austere funding and extreme competition for resources, private social programs are ready targets for politically motivated evaluations that use short-term procedures, rigid guidelines, miniscule sample size, shifting populations, and limited dependent variables for political purposes. Once these documents are published, a successful defense is weak at best.

Internal political pressures have also worked to confound evaluation results as organizations consciously or subconsciously attempt to exert a certain degree of influence on the evaluation of their program. Evaluation may even be influenced by simply avoiding studies or by financially starving them when it becomes hard to accept or utilize results. There is a feeling of security and freedom inherent in secrecy

or obscurity.

Client expectations are often not completely sound -- the client may say "let the chips fall where they may" but not really mean it or even realize the ramifications of this statement. When assessing the internal climate that will affect evaluation efforts, the external evaluator must ask several questions.

- What use will be made of positive or negative results?
- Is the evaluation to assess, improve, or justify?
- Is evaluation motivated for political reasons?
- Who will use the information?
- Will it be released to the public? Parents?
- How open are the various elements of the system?
- Is information presently available that has not been used in the decision process?
- How sincere is the professed dedication to evaluation?
- Is the commitment consistent with the actual degree of effort expended?
- How much training of program personnel is indicated?
- How much political effort is needed to deal with the system, its structure, and personnel?

One unfortunate characteristic of innovative programs in the behavioral sciences is their inclination to take basically sound ideas and turn them into fads. This is usually accomplished by the people who are intimately invovled with and have established personal ownership in the program, presenting it with great enthusiasm and, in the process, making speculative claims about what it will accomplish. When the complexities

of human behavior and learning processes keep the idea from developing as envisioned, a reaction sets in. Such reactions are usually attacks (or are perceived as attacks) and are seldom efforts to take what is sound in an idea and use it for the betterment of the program.

The Present Eckerd Evaluation Program

In June 1976, the Eckerd Foundation contacted the Educational Research and Evaluation Center at The University of West Florida in Pensacola for their services as an external evaluator. This affiliation resulted in a series of small, evaluative and training projects designed to meet specific, short-term, urgent, but unrelated needs.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that a newly established innovative program, having as its primary concern the solution of the day-to-day problems of existence, seldom develops an orientation toward the evaluative process or its necessary feedback mechanisms. This is especially true during the earliest stages of development when decision bases tend to be more intuitive. Later, when a need is seen for more solid evidence or complex data, a means of generating information must be retrofitted to the system. This adjustment is usually a compromise and is often accompanied with some trauma to the system.

Upon entering the Eckerd System, all of the previously discussed considerations, as well as some other factors unique to this organization, had to be faced. Several immediate evaluative needs were defined by the client which had to be resolved before a comprehensive evaluation program could be implemented. Finally, the means of evaluation had to be adjusted (and continually readjusted) to fit the existing organization while creating a minimum of upset to its operations.

In performing their function, the evaluators started where the client was and not where they desired them to be. Often an overall plan for evaluation is desired but all that is possible is a piecemeal approach. It then falls upon the evaluator to maintain continuity and to keep in mind the overall goal and pattern of the effort. Theoretically, a good process is clear and systematic. This idealistic situation seldom occurs in real life, especially in atypical programs. The process of evaluation is often disjointed, affected by the rush of events and emergencies, and serves a variety of unrelated demands. It is up to the evaluator to fit the pieces of this puzzle together to insure an ultimate, cohesive, and rational product that is also sensitive to client needs.

Early in the affiliation, it was recognized that there would be a need to assist the Eckerd System in defining how it was to use evaluation -- what decisions needed a better information base, how to use this information effectively in the decision process, and how to communicate and analyze data accurately and rapidly. Evaluation was necessarily an educational process for the client as well as an assessment process.

The University staff worked closely with Eckerd personnel in defining purposes and needs: thus ensuring some degree of responsiveness to the client while maintaining continuity of effort. A union of internal agents intimately knowledgeable with the Eckerd System and experienced in its operation, and external evaluators who were isolated from the political issues was arranged. This included a long-term commitment to avoid the superficiality of short-term studies.

Evaluation proceeded cautiously in providing information and possible alternatives. Care was taken not to overload the client with

superfluous data and stilted jargon. Short-term evaluations had not succeeded in providing accurate or useful data and several of these studies were constantly reappearing to haunt the program. Neither would lengthy and time-consuming evaluations that would bombard the administrators with complex data and undecipherable verbiage serve any useful purpose. A careful path was chosen which would provide the client with what they felt was needed but did not oversimplify or create inaccuracies which could cause later difficulty.

An attempt was made to state results in such a manner as to preclude unjustified assumptions or interpretations. Eichelberger (1979) observed that:

> There are many pressures on evaluation contractors to make an evaluation appear as comprehensive and valid as possible. The limitations in the chosen set of variables and associated measures are seldom presented and discussed. When such discussions are not presented, the reader may be left with the impression that all important variables were included in the evaluation, and that the procedures used measured them validly and comprehensively. As a result, the particular groups whose interests are served by the results based on these variables will use the results to fight for a decision that supports their position and gives them more of the resources. In any situation which is inherently limited and where interpretations are subjectively based, if the rationales and caveats do not appear appropriately in the report, the evaluator must take some responsibility for any perceived misuse of the

evaluative information. (p. 17)

In the Eckerd program, as in most atypical programs -- especially those in the behavioral sciences -- evaluation faces a moving target and taking aim with any degree of accuracy is difficult. When a methodology is developed and a target is defined, external pressures, internal adjustments, and changes in clientele may move the prey. If evaluation strategies cannot meet the demands of these changes and be able to flexibly adjust to meet changing needs, they are doomed to becoming historical documents -- interesting but of only minimal relevance.

Eichelberger (1979) proposed that there are four issues that must be faced by an evaluator upon entering a system (p. 16):

1) The involvement of contending stakeholders with diverse values and interests.

2) The inevitable subjectivity of all data and its interpretation.

3) The necessary knowledge required to make interpretations.

4) The need for evaluation to be flexible so the needs of dynamic programs can be met.

A well-conceived evaluation of an atypical program takes time, and the client may be impatient for a quick return. To satisfy this impatience and to meet situational demands, frequent, interim reports should be generated. It is incumbent upon the evaluator to keep these reports in context by periodically providing compilations and summaries.

Within the context provided by the above factors and considerations, an overall strategy and unified program for evaluation has begun to emerge in the Eckerd-West Florida affiliation. It is hoped that this program will meet the needs of future Foundation growth while providing the necessary investigative rigor to improve the fund of knowledge of

therapeutic camping programs. It is also hoped that it will assist in expanding the reach of those aspects of the program that appear most valuable in the treatment of emotionally disturbed youth.

Evaluation Elements

The evaluative strategy for the Eckerd Camping System presently involves nine major elements:

1) The development of program goals and objectives.

2) The collection and processing of program data.

3) In-program camper progress assessment.

4) The development of a program audit for the standardization of treatment plans within the system.

5) The assessment of past campers.

6) The preparation of a case study file.

7) Program self-study for educational accreditation.

8) Comparative studies with other existing programs for the treatment of youth in similar categories as Eckerd campers.

9) The preparation and presentation of evaluation results.

Program goals and objectives. The evaluation of a treatment is facilitated immeasurably by an objective description of that treatment. Otherwise, some form of goal-free evaluation becomes mandatory. A set of measurable objectives is also needed for the selection of standardized tests or the development of program assessment instruments. When establishing the original Eckerd System, the program administrators attempted to develop a set of goals and objectives, but the results were overly subjective and relied heavily on descriptions of activities. This lack of a well-conceived set of goals and measurable objectives severely

handicapped program description to outside agents, plans for evaluation, and the development of effective measures.

It was decided that the goals and objectives of the program could best be developed by a team of Eckerd personnel, using University staff as facilitators and trainers. In selecting team members, three conditions had to be met. First, team members were to be acceptable to management. Otherwise, their final product stood a very good chance of being rejected. Second, the team's level of competence and knowledge in program details had to be accepted by Eckerd workers and staff. If this condition was not met, the operating personnel would not feel ownership in what was developed. Finally, all sub-groups within the program staff were to be represented on the team. This would help assure that all needs were met and that there would be a broad base of support.

To actually select the team, a survey was conducted of the entire Eckerd staff. Personnel were asked to identify two individuals who, in their opinion, were most influential and from whom they would most likely seek professional assistance. From the compilation of this survey, lists by job type (e.g. counselor, social worker) were made and presented to management for a final selection of the nine team members. This final team was composed of personnel capable of representing both management and operating personnel from the various camps and the central administration.

The actual goal and objective development process included three, one-week seminars. Each of these three weeks were separated by an interval of three to four weeks. About one-third of the time was devoted to training the team in task accomplishment, conflict resolution, group dynamics, objectives development, and other topics pertinent to the job at

hand.

During the first week a program philosophy was written. This philosophy was subsequently used as a guide in objective development. The team then identified the features that distinguish the wilderness therapeutic program from all other similar youth programs. These parameters consisted of a set of descriptors and features that sets this program apart. Finally, a set of six overall program goals was written. The program philosophy, descriptors, and goals were then forwarded to management for approval and constructive feedback.

During the second week the team recycled the interim product using the feedback provided. They then developed general and specific behavioral objectives for each of the six goals. Again, these were distributed to management for feedback and approval.

The third week was devoted to a final recycling and polishing of the overall product. A report of the agreed upon result was distributed and ultimately adopted as an Eckerd System policy statement and guide. As such, it was to serve as guidance in subsequent program development and administration and as a yardstick for future evaluation efforts. They could additionally serve as a useful tool in describing the program to others.

Collection and processing of data. From the beginning of the evaluation program, it was recognized that the vast amount of data being collected by the program could provide an invaluable source of information to describe program clients, to assess program impact, and upon which to base future decisions. This data could be processed to determine if the program was serving those clients it purported to be designed to serve

or to determine if there are differences in client populations between camps or states or if population characteristics have shifted over time. It was also recognized that the presently used standardized tests were neither sufficiently reliable or valid or were often improperly used in their present context; and no method was presently available to store, sort, or analyze this information so that those responsible for decisions could have access to it rapidly and accurately.

A study was made of the program and its testing needs. This study included a suggested testing program with several alternatives for each element. An ad hoc committee of Eckerd and University personnel met to discuss and select a coordinated testing strategy and to choose the individual tests to be used. The recommendations of this committee were presented to and approved by management.

The testing battery selected consisted of seven tests to be given at three intervals during the camper's stay. The following were the tests chosen:

1) Bender-Gestalt. A short test to screen for phsiological origins for behavior.

2) Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, revised (WISC-R). A test of general intelligence. Given at entry, mid-point, and departure.

3) Detroit Test of Learning Aptitude. A test of general intelligence and learning problems. Given upon entry and departure.

4) Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. A test of general self-concept. Given at entry, mid-point, and departure.

5) California Test of Personality. A test of personal and social adjustment. Given at entry, mid-point, and departure.

6) California Achievement Test. A test of reading and mathematics achievement. Given at entry, mid-point, and departure.

7) Devereaux Adolescent Behavior Rating Scale. A test of observed behavioral traits. Given at the end of the first six-week period, at mid-point, and departure. Mean scores of ratings by four to six close observers are used.

Results of tests are interpreted by psychometrists and sent to the individual camp to be used to develop individual camper treatment plans. They are then forwarded to the University to be placed on the computer file for use in group analysis.

A summary of entry descriptive data on a sample of clients enrolled in the Eckerd System between July and December 1978 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Average Entry Characteristics of Present Active Campers In The Eckerd Wilderness Camping System (Griffin and Wittwer, 1979)

	Mean	Range	N
Age	13.4	9-17	271
Mental Age	11.5		88
IQ (WISC-R)	89	59-121	102
Reading level (CAT)	4.8 GE	.6-13.6	98
Mathematics level (CAT)	4.9 GE	.6-13.6	91
Days truant in year prior to entry	14.7		93
Number of siblings in family	3.9		267
Living with 2 parents (natural or adoptive)	25.4%		68
Family income	$10,569		267
Legal convictions prior to entry	2.2		267
Youth commitments prior to entry	.42		268
Personality: Personal adjustment level	28%		
Social adjustment level	21%		
Emotional distance (percentile)	39%		

The range of characteristics of these clients is extreme and results in a need for addressing an unusual span of problems. Their reading and mathematics achievement spans the entire potential range of the California Achievement Test. Camper test scores indicate that the camper's achievement levels are two years behind what would be expected. These findings are substantiated by high correlations between tests of similar constructs.

A study of their case histories indicates that they typically have a working acquaintance with the legal system, as exhibited by their prior youth commitment and court records. Their mean family income is below average but their families average more children than the national norm. Over half come from, what would usually be termed, broken homes.

Camper Progress Assessment. A method was also needed to assess observed behavior in a more objective manner than was possible by the existing use of open-ended reports. Past assessment instruments were analyzed for those types of behavior considered to be significant by the organization and designers of instruments purporting to measure similar clients. Observation items were divided into six broad categories and each item was to be marked on a five-point Likert scale. The final instrument was used in a pilot study in one camp then critiqued by the camp staff. An item analysis and review was made of the results of the survey and items were added, deleted, changed, or combined to maximize coverage and minimize overlap. Although still in a developmental stage, the two instruments resulting from this study provide a fairly complete assessment of observed behavior and is tailored to meet the unique features of this program and its clientele. Although the instruments possess only face validity, efforts at determining concurrent validity and reliability are underway.

Taking into consideration all available test results and camper data collected on their state's clients, the North Carolina Department of Human Resources (January 1979) state that:

> . . . the profile taken as a whole indicates that the camp is admitting children who need the treatment provided; they have identifiable problems supported by test results reflecting similar problems; and they have failed to respond to less intense treatment modalities. Their placement in the Therapeutic Camping Program therefore seems appropriate. (p. 32)

Once a method was adopted to test behaviors and collect other available data, a system was needed to process, store, and analyze this vast amount of information. To accomplish this, a statistical package was adapted to the program's needs by the University's computer center. The following variables, or sets of variables, were selected for inclusion:

Camper file number
Sex
Race
Date of birth
County of residence
Population density of county of residence
Parents education
Parents occupation
Family income and who generates income
Family reliance on governmental assistance
Number of children in family
Birth order of camper
Who lived with prior to entry
Number of prior schools in which enrolled
School grade upon entry
School truancy record
Prior legal conviction record
Prior youth services referral and commitment record
Time between referral and acceptance
Camp assignment
Date of camp entry

All test scores and subscores
Observed ability to accept camp routines
Observed ability to socialize with peers in camp
Observed general behavior
Observed educational readiness
Observed relationships with family
Observed family relationships with camper and program
Date of departure from program
Reason for program departure

Information on over 400 currently active campers was stored in the management information system. Also included was any partial data available on nearly 800 campers who had previously been discharged. This provided an immediate data bank on nearly 1,200 campers -- a number that will grow daily. The only immediate impediment to this storage and analysis system has been the difficulty in obtaining sufficient funding for development and implementation.

Program audit. As the Eckerd System expanded to nine camps in three states, a need for providing a process which could aid in assessing the degree of standardization from camp to camp was identified. There was a feeling within the organization that the program had enough value to justify its continuing exportation and growth. It was also felt that if the program grew, a lack of quality control could weaken the process unless some process evaluation method could be developed. Assurance was needed that there was "a program" and not many "programs" and that local changes or adjustments would be based on unique needs of a camp and not on the whims or interpretation. Only through the vehicle of a well-conceived program audit, based on overall objectives and goals, could quality and standardization be assured.

An audit instrument using program objectives was constructed by University personnel and Eckerd staff working in concert. This instrument underwent field testing and was revised several times. A final

compromise instrument was developed to include checks on most aspects of the program, management, and administration operations. This instrument was to be given to all camps by top management over a two week period. Although many insights were gained from this grand tour, the process of actually doing it may have yielded more benefits to the organization than any actual product of the inspection.

Assessment of past campers. Considering the restrictions and caveats necessary in making cause-and-effect conclusions, it was still felt that there was a need to see what the program had done in the past and identify what changes may have occurred in past camper profiles. It was recognized that there would be an inherent danger in simplistically assessing affects on past clients and interpretating program impact only on the basis of recidivism, as other studies have done. Using this criterion alone imposes extreme rigor on program assessment. Application of such rigor on other programs has often resulted in finding little impact of treatment in any juvenile or criminal behavioral modification program, and leaves little evidence to justify program worth and expense. Even recidivism itself has various interpretations or definitions, depending on who is conducting the study and what purpose is to be served. Recidivism is a highly subjective measurement that can erroneously appear to be a coldly objective measure of performance.

The first group of past clients to be studied included a random sample of 111 campers who had left the program six to eighteen months previously (Watson and Wittwer, 1977). This study found that the client's reentry environment was basically similar to that which existed prior to the camper's original entry into the program. But they did find that the

camper returned home with better family coping skills, improved feelings of self-esteem, improved capability of coping with own temper, and a positive feeling toward the camp experience.

Two additional past client studies are now nearing completion. The first includes a group randomly selected from those original campers enrolled in the Eckerd System and the second includes a group randomly selected from those campers who were in the program in the interval between the other two studies.

None of these past camper studies include groups who have experienced the new transitional classroom -- a program element strongly encouraged by past studies and implemented only recently. It has thus been recommended that a third longitudinal tracking study be implemented. This study could include a random sample of those campers who have entered the program since the implementation of the transitional classroom and should be sufficiently large to allow for normal mortality and still be representative enough to allow generalizations on program impact. It is recommended that this group be tracked at key intervals (e.g. one year, two years, three years, ten years) and that tracking continue until mortality reduces the sample to the point where inferences are no longer appropriate or until the program again makes a major change.

Case study file. Evaluation research of a typical program tends to emphasize product or process evaluation -- comparing populations which have experienced an intervention program to a population which has not experienced it. Bennis (1968) states, "I have yet to see a manuscript that describes an intervention strategy other than an interpersonal one, this is serious when one considers that the most pivoted strategies or change in our society are political, legal, and technological."

(p. 228). Consideration should be given to implementing a program where a very careful and rigorous process of describing the intervention process is conducted. The use of case studies could partially fill this gap in the Eckerd program.

Educational accreditation. Although not a task directly assigned to the evaluation staff, accreditation self-studies are an element of and use the findings of the overall evaluation process. These studies have followed the relevant accrediting agencies' guidelines, are conducted by the Eckerd System superintendent of education, and the results are made available to the entire system. Accreditation has been granted in the State of Florida and the self-study process is planned for North Carolina.

Comparative studies. A rigorous study comparing Eckerd clients with those of a comparable nature in another program is an obvious approach to program evaluation. Difficulties emerge when attempting to obtain a satisfactory and equivalent group in other programs as none exist. Secondly, the numbers available for consideration in even slightly similar groups is very small. Despite these difficulties, a study of this nature is still being conducted. The evaluation design includes a comparison of two groups of approximately sixty adjudicated delinquents in Florida. The first group were committed to the Eckerd System and the comparison group were committed to a state training facility. A comparison of the variables of court contacts and school adjustment is being made at six, twelve, and eighteen months after release from their respective programs.

Presentation of evaluation reports. Consistent with providing the

client information which is most usable, various interpretive reports are provided to Eckerd management. Jargon is minimized and only data is provided which is translatable for the decision process. Caution is exercised so as not to overload the client with unnecessary information, thereby jeopardizing the use of all that is available.

Annually a report is prepared with all salient findings, including significant data from testing programs and MIS analysis and information to support necessary decisions, as identified by management. Interim reports are provided upon completion of each element or step of evaluation. Other, special reports are provided as and when needed. As the client becomes more knowledgeable and sophisticated in the use of these reports, their detail is expanded. With this increase also comes an increase in the volume and complexity of requested information. The evaluator must be sensitive to this growing need to better serve the client.

Program managers will always need short-term, politically-oriented evaluative materials because decisions affecting the program are usually made in the political or public arena. However, the evaluation system must be able to predict what effect the decisions will have on the program and provide management with data which is supportable.

Summary

Since its beginning in 1968, the Eckerd Wilderness Educational System has undergone major changes. Some of these changes have been growth generated while others reflect shifts in program emphasis or reinterpretations of goals as a result of previous evaluations or program experience.

In the development of an overall scheme for the evaluation program for the Eckerd System, five major steps have been undertaken. First,

the evaluators assisted program personnel in defining their objectives and articulating and recognizing their needs, and have helped them interpret and utilize evaluation results. Second, the present testing program was placed on a firmer basis, utilizing sound instruments which were adaptable to this unique system. Third, a process was implemented for storing, processing, and analyzing the numerous variables being collected on campers. Fourth, well-defined goals and measureable objectives consistent with the program's philosophy were developed. Fifth, an attempt was made to document the program's process in such a way that others could dip into it and transport key elements elsewhere as an aid to other disturbed children. And, finally, every effort was made to maintain the flexibility in evaluation approach that is necessary in the study of a dynamic program and to meet any needs as they arose.

Many past studies of therapeutic camping have been politically motivated and have concentrated on end results or cause-and-effect relationships. These studies have, at least, served as educational tools for the organization under study and have tended to further their growth and improve their subsequent evaluation efforts. An enlightened analysis of past studies (as well as those presently in process) has not indicated any dramatic breakthrough in child treatment methods. However, they <u>have</u> shown that the program is growing, developing, and improving and it <u>is</u> a humane alternative in child treatment. Maybe the greatest contribution of an atypical program, such as the Eckerd Camps, is to provide the children that are sent to them with a physically, emotionally, morally, and psychologically safe place to mature for a brief period. This is process, not product. Maybe this program can also do a service by taking children who have often had only one role model in their lives -- a less socially acceptable one -- and

providing them with alternative role models -- models that illustrate moral, responsible adult roles and socially acceptable social patterns. In this sense, the program may provide a child who has had few choices in life -- none good -- with a broader selection of alternatives. This is process, not product. It may then be up to the individual child to choose and society can do little else to influence that choice. But, at least now there is a choice.

Conclusion

To meet the needs of the atypical program, evaluation must remain flexible and meet the dynamic changes inevitable with programs of this nature. Since the program deals with ever changing humans, the target of evaluation will inevitably change as well. Unlike pure research which deals with fixed variables and static conditions over a finite period of time, evaluation must be as dynamic and flexible as its subject. In conducting atypical evaluation, there is always the temptation to over-rely on experimental designs or their derivatives. But experimental design tends to prevent rather than promote change as these program changes destroy the design. Experimental techniques are useful after a program has run its full course, but, in evaluation, this has little value as evaluation is needed during the development and operation of a system, not when it is finished. Atypical evaluation is thus formative where experimental research tends to be summative.

There is also a temptation to rely on cause-and-effect relationships dealing with measureable or controllable variables. An overreliance on the security of the experimental design and external pressures fosters this tendency. Concentrating on the end product is tantamount to

advocating that the end justifies the means. But in the behavioral sciences, the means (process) may be every bit as important as the end. Parallel programs with equal results (assuming equality can be established) but unequal processes cannot be considered as totally comparable. In dealing with humans, the treatment can seldom (if ever) control all significant variables and the duration of the treatment is often miniscule in comparison to the time of effect of other factors. The variable of self-choice may be the final, most important factor of all. It is, therefore, presumptuous to consider that a short-term, limited treatment program (whether this is a therapeutic camp, a school, or a clinical program) can have more than a limited impact on long-term behavior.

In the evaluation of this atypical system, problems have arisen and shortcomings have been identified. There has been a decided tendency to withhold information until the evaluator is comfortable with the results and then to couch them in terms that meet evaluator needs. A tendency to concentrate on one, overpowering summary did not provide what was needed, when it was needed. Frequent, brief, clear, and usable reports would tend to build a support base for evaluation and enhance the use of results. Second, the difficulties of arriving at real needs and assisting the organization with using results effectively have been particularly vexing problems. Third, little has been done to study the impact of program implementation (e.g. administrative difficulties, growth patterns, funding problems, internal and external political pressures) on the process itself. The atypical process does not function in clinical isolation and the complexity of the environment increases the complexity of the process itself. Finally, evaluation's research heritage, the power of the standardized test and computer processes, and the demands for "bottom-line" results have

continually worked to move atypical evaluation into more typical molds. The evaluator's constant question has been "are we really using atypical means with this program?" Often the answer has been, "sometimes." Maybe this is a proper answer. Maybe an atypical program is best served with a careful mix of typical and atypical approaches. Creating this proper mix is the "art" of evaluation.

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